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ABSTRACT

In 1960, the New York City Public School System was decentralized into 32 school districts with limited authority over elementary and junior high schools. Locally elected district community school boards were provided for by State legislation. In this study factors relevant to predicting a candidate's success or failure in the 1975 and 1977 school board elections are examined. Among the variables considered are the amount of education a candidate possesses; his or her ethnic/racial background, and the extent of his or her financial backing. Reasons for conducting the study are outlined. These include the need expressed by the Elections Study Committee for identifying problem areas in future school board elections, and the general scarcity of hard data on school board elections in New York City and elsewhere. The methodology of the study is described. The different significance of the above mentioned variables in the two election years is discussed. Results of a multiple regression analysis, conducted in order to predict outcome, are presented. Educational and financial variables were found to be of greater value than demographic variables in predicting election outcome. Statistical data are presented in table form. (GC)

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A Comparative Analysis of Factors Related To a Candidates' Success or Failure in the 1975 and 1977 Community School Board Elections in New York City

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INTRODUCTION

In 1969 the New York State Legislature decentralized the New York City Public School System into 32* schools districts with a limited amount of authority over Elementary and Junior High Schools. The legislation provided for locally elected Community School Boards in these Districts. The purpose of this study is to identify factors relevant to predicting a candidates' success or failure in the elections of 1975 and 1977.

School Board elections in New York City have been perceived by many to be a source of controversy (see Ticktin and Lurie), including charges of fraud and worse.

> The PEA experience in...community school board elections leads us to conclude that instead of encouraging new participating in self-government and responsible citizenship, the way the elections were structured and conducted leads people to far greater cynicism, frustration in some instances, rebelliousness (Seeley, P.2.).

* Originally 31 Districts were established, but by 1973 two districts were formed out of one existing district.

One reason for this type of feeling was the lack of planning and preparation for these elections. It was clear that under the appropriate legislation both the Board of Education and the Board of Elections have certain responsibilities, but it was not clear as to who had the ultimate responsibility of initiating action. As a result of this lack of leadership a city-wide committee was formed to provide needed direction and leadership. This group - The Community School Board Elections Study Committee (later Cordinating Committee) - is an informal consortium of over twenty civic, labor, parent and educational groups concerned with the process of school board elections. Included in the committee membership the writers of this paper.

While this committee has no formal status, it has played an increasingly active role in school board elections. Two examples of the committee's accomplishments are its acting as a catalyst for the passage of legislation allowing mail registration for "Parent Voters"; and its persuading the New York City Central Board of Education to establish a Fair Campaign Practices Commission (i.e. Special Circular #56, New York City Board of Education, 1977), to enforce a code of ethics for the elections.

The diversity of opinion represented in the committee usually precludes unanimity, but not in trying to determine ways to improve the electoral process. It was this concern that lead the committee to examine various aspects of the elections process in order to deterine priorities for improvement. A questionnaire

was prepared to collect data from all candidates in the 1975 election, successful and unsuccessful, on the election process. This questionnaire, which isolated over seventy variables, sought information on the full range of the candidate's experiences, starting with his/her decision to run for office, the petitioning period, the actual campaign, and the final results. The committee was interested in using the data obtained from the questionnaire in order to gain insight into those factors influencing the political and electoral process. It was expected that the responses would aid the committee in its efforts to assist candidates in future school board elections, and that problems areas would be identified and sought to be corrected by legislature action. One example of this type of concern is in the financing of school board elections.

Under New York State Law, school board elections do not require financial disclosure by the candidates, nor is the State Board of Elections required to do any type of financial monitoring. Knowing how much money candidates spent, where this money came from, and other related information, would help the committee determine whether or not it should press for a change in the law.

Another reason behind the committee's decision to commission the 1975 study is the scarcity of hard data about School Board Elections in New York City as well as elsewhere. Many studies have been done on financial elections, but there is a lack of

material focusing on individual candidates, and reasons for success or failure. Indeed, most studies of election success or failure, in any type of election, focus on the population at large and do not identify which characteristics of a candidate, or his/her campaign techniques, are correlated with winning or losing. As an example many Presidential, Congressional, and Govenatorial elections have been studied with the emphasis on how and why certain demographic groups vote. However, what is lacking are studies which look at the problem from the candidate's viewpoint. Do candidates with a certain amount of education, or from a specific Ethnic/Racial background, or with greater than average financial backing have a statistically significantly better chance of winning an election? Zimet, and Gittell touch on this, but only briefly. Williams has looked at this problem in somewhat greater depth.

The writers* chose to analyze these and other variables using the Community School Board Elections in New York City. The authors of this paper were then given access to the data collected by the School Board Elections Study Committee and subsequently, with minor revisions, used the same questionnaire to survey all the candidates in the 1977 elections. One important

* Mr. Richard Schulman of Hunter College, New York City served as Senior Research Associate for this study.

difference in the survey process is that the candidates in the 1975 election (held by Law on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in May) were not sent the questionnaire until May of 1976, a full year after the elections were conducted. In 1977, however, the questionnaire was received by the candidates in June of the same year. This is one major factor accounting for the difference in the number of valid returns for the two sets of candidates.

METHODOLOGY AND EQUIVALENCE OF THE SAMPLES

For the earlier group questionnaires were mailed to all 799 candidates; 201 candidates responded, along with another 43 that were returned by the Post Office as undeliverable. A follow-up mailing was sent to a randomly selected group of 205 non-respondents with negligible success, resulting in a total usuable return of 208. For the 1977 elections, questionnaires were mailed to all 803 candidates; 398 valid responses were returned. A follow-up mailing to all non-respondents produced a total usable return of 416; with a total of 32 returned by the Post Office as undeliverable.

The investigators checked on the representativeness of the returns in light of known total population parameters. The criteria for representativeness included sample-population matching on the following:

1. Percentage of those winning the elections.

2. Percentage of male and female candidates.

3. Percentage of candidates from each community school district.

Inspection of the above variables disclosed that the maximum sample population discrepancy did not exceed three precent.

Basically, we found that the demographics of the two samples were fairly similar. One example of this is that in 1975, 67% of the respondents were males, and 32% females. In 1977 the percentage of males responding was 65, and females 34. Another example of the similarity of background characteristics is the mean age of candidates; in the 1975 elections it was 41.3 as opposed to 39.8 for the 1977 elections. In 1975 20% of the respondents' level of formal education termintated with a High School Diploma or ended prior to the 12th grade. In 1977, 20% of the sample population were in this catagory. In 1975, 28% indicated they had completed college; in the 1977 group the figure was 25%. Those reporting post graduate education was 50% in 1975 and 54% in 1977.

However, this similarity of samples is not apparant in the percentage of candidates within the different Racial/Ethnic groups. Based upon candidates who did answer this question the percentage of candidates who identified themselves as Black was 21 in 1975, and 30 in 1977; Spanish surnamed was 16 in 1975 and 24 in 1977; Jewish was 24 in both 1975 and 1977; Italian was 10 in both years; Other White was 29 in 1975 and 11 in 1977. (Orientals are included in the Other White catagory due to the

miniscule number of Oriental respondents.)

Table I shows a comparison of the ethnic distributions for the 1975 and 1977 sample groups (for all respondents who answered the question). The data indicates that by far the greatest change takes place in the Other White catagory where the percentage of all candidates drops from 29% in 1975 to 11% in 1977. Although the 2 Other White cells are but one-fifth of all cells, they contribute about 70% of the significant Chi square value. Black and Hispanic groups increase somewhat from 1975 to 1977 while the Jewish and Italian groups remain essentially the same percentage of the candidate samples.

TABLE I

Percentage of Five Ethnic Groups Running for Community School Boards in 1975 and 1977.

YEAR OF ELECTION	Ethnic Groups				
	BLACK	HISPANIC	JEWISH	ITALIAN	OTHER WHITE
1975	21%	16%	24%	10%	29%
	34	24	38	21	48
1977	30%	24%	24%	10%	11%
	120	93	96	40	45

Chi square = 31.54 df = 4

P $\lessdot$ .001

One interesting aspect of the above data is the increase in the number of minority candidates in the 1977 election. This

was accomplished with an increase in voter turnout in those Districts where minority voters comprise the bulk of the population. While the percentage of eligible voters in minority areas increased, the percentage of eligible voters who did vote decreased for the city as a whole.

Although in 1975 there were no differences among ethnic groups with respect to rate of winning Community School Board elections (see table 2), there were such differences in 1977. In 1977, while reduced in percentage of total candidate sample, the Other White group wins at a significantly higher than expected rate (see table 3). At the same time the Black group wins at a somewhat less than expected rate.

TABLE 2

Rate of Winning in 1975 Community School Board Elections for Five Ethnic Groups.

WINNING	BLACK	HISPANIC	JEWISH	ITALIAN	OTHER WHITE
YES	32%	45%	42%	48%	49%
	11	10	16	10	23
NO	68%	55%	58%	52%	51%
	23	12	22	11	24

Chi square = 2.49 df = 4

P > .10

TABLE 3

Rate of Winning in 1977 Community School Board Election for Five Ethnic Groups.

WINNING	BLACK	HISPANIC	JEWISH	ITALIAN	OTHER WHITE
YES	21%	40%	44%	37%	69%
	24	17	42	14	31
NO	79%	60%	56%	63%	31%
	90	26	54	24	14

Chi square = 33.48 df = 4

$P \leq .001$

Not only do the population demographics show a degree of similarity, but resource - experience variables for the two sets of sample populations are also similar. The median number of signatures filed in 1975 was 500, while in 1977 it was 482. Furthermore, in 1975, the decision to run was the candidates' own idea 41% of the time; suggested by an individual 17% and at the urging of a group 40%. In 1977 the corresponding figures are 39% own idea, 15% suggested by another individual, and 45% by a group. Moreover, in financial terms the median amount of cash spent was $100.00 for both elections.

PREDICTION OF ELECTION OUTCOME

Two sets of variables were selected for examination with respect to their relationship to winning the Community School

Board Elections. These variable sets were labeled "demographic variables" (i.e., sex, age ethnic group, education and occupation) and "experience and resource" variables (i.e., number of previous years on board, previous running experience, ran on a slate, number of signatures filed, out of pocket expenses, friends contribution and total cash spent) by the investigators. Each set was then entered into a Stepwise Multiple Regression analysis with election outcome (i.e., did the candidate win or lose?) as the dependent variable.

As shown in Tables 4 through 7 the variable of pervious running experience (yes or no) is the highest single correlate of winning, although for the 1975 sample the correlation is .289 while for the 1977 sample the correlation is .413. The set of experience and resource variables produce significantly higher multiple R's than the set of demographic variables for both election years sampled. For the 1975 sample experience and resource variables produced a multiple R of .466 compared to one of .255 (not statistically significant at .10 level) for the demographic variables. For the 1977 sample experience and resource variables produced a multiple R of .539 compared to one of .380 for the demographic variables.

One of the most interesting differences between the 1975 and 1977 sample analysis is with respect to the percentage of variance accounted for in election outcome. In 1975 the set of variables designated as resource and experience accounted

for about 22% of the outcome variance. In 1977 this same set accounted for 29% of the outcome variance. This difference can be largely attributed to the previous running experience of the candidates which in 1975 accounted for 5.2% of the variance, while in 1977 its explanatory potency more than doubled to 10.9% of the variance.

Thus it seems that the group of variables labeled resource and experience are much more potent in predicting the outcome of a Community School Board Election than demographic variables. The identification of a single most powerful predictor points to previous running experience in both our 1975 and 1977 sample, although much more strongly in 1977 than in 1975.

TABLE 4

Election Year 1975 Demographic Variable

Variable Description	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	t. test	df	Unique Variance
Sex	0.2225	0.212	2.60*	190	.033
Age	0.0001	0.002	0.02	190	.000
Ethnic					
Black	0.0993	0.074	0.80	190	.003
Hispanic	-0.0010	-0.001	0.01	190	.000
Jewish	-0.0495	-0.039	-0.44	190	.001
Italian	-0.0725	-0.044	-0.52	190	.001
Other White	-0.1273	-0.108	-1.20	190	.007
Educationl Level					
Elementary or High School Graduate	-0.0188	-0.014	-0.13	190	.000
College Graduate	0.0163	0.015	0.12	190	.000
Post Graduate Work	0.0058	0.006	0.04	190	.000
Occupation					
Professional	-0.1969	-0.143	-1.36	190	.009
Education/Student	0.0380	0.035	0.30	190	.000
White Collar	-0.0760	-0.060	-0.56	190	.002
Blue Collar	-0.1722	-0.084	-0.96	190	.005
Homemaker	0.1452	0.071	0.79	190	.003
Social Work	-0.1185	-0.075	-0.75	190	.003
Regression Constant	1.278				

Multiple Correlation Squared = 0.065 F = 0.83 with 16 and 190 Degrees of Freedom (P over .500)

Multiple Correlation = 0.255

NOTE

* P $\leq$ .05
** P $\leq$ .01
*** P $\leq$ .001

TABLE 3

Election Year 1977 Demographic Variable

Variable Description	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	t. test	df	Unique Variance
Sex	-0.0340	-0.033	-0.58	385	.001
Age	-0.0071	-0.168	-3.18**	385	.022
Ethnic					
Black	0.1489	0.137	1.30	385	.004
Hispanic	-0.1426	-0.121	-1.23	385	.003
Jewish	-0.0341	-0.029	-0.29	385	.000
Italian	-0.0143	-0.009	-0.11	385	.000
Other White	-0.2753	-0.174	-2.18*	385	.011
Educational Level					
Elementary or High School Graduate	-0.1709	-0.133	-1.46	385	.005
College Graduate	-0.0594	-0.052	-0.54	385	.001
Post College Work	-0.1274	-0.130	-1.21	385	.003
Occupation					
Professional	-0.1928	-0.100	-1.50	385	.005
Education/Student	-0.1191	-0.114	-1.20	385	.003
White Collar	-0.0277	-0.025	-0.29	385	.000
Blue Collar	-0.0537	-0.025	-0.39	385	.000
Homemaker	-0.2279	-0.140	-1.92	385	.008
Social Work	-0.0273	-0.015	-0.23	385	.000
Regression Constant	2.165				

Multiple Correlation Squared = 0.145 F = 4.07 with 16 and 385 Degrees of Freedom (P under .001)

Multiple Correlation = 0.380

NOTE

* $P \leq .05$
** $P \leq .01$
*** $P \leq .001$

TABLE 6

Election Year 1975 Experience-Resource Variables

Variable Description	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	t. test	df	Unique Variance
Previous Years in Office	-0.0163	-0.146	-2.18*	199	.019
Previously Ran for School Board	0.2080	0.263	3.65***	199	0.52
On a Slate	0.1100	0.199	2.81**	199	.031
Number of Signatures Filed	-0.0001	-0.104	-1.47	199	.008
Out of Pocket Cash Spent	-0.0003	-0.152	-1.67	199	.011
Friends Contribution	-0.0011	-0.286	-3.28**	199	.042
Total Cash Spent	0.0003	0.242	2.27	199	.020
Regression Constant	1.255				

Multiple Correlation Squared = 0.217 F = 7.89 with 7 and 199 Degrees of Freedom (P under .001)

Multiple Correlation = 0.466

NOTE

* $P \leq .05$

** $P \leq .01$

*** $P \leq .001$

TABLE 7

Election Year 1977 Experience-Resource Variables

Variable Description	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	t. test	df	Unique Variance
Previous Years in Office	-0.0052	-0.076	-1.67	394	.005
Previously Run for School Board	0.3795	0.359	7.79***	394	.109
On a Slate	0.0628	0.064	1.33	394	.003
Number of Signatures Filed	-0.0003	-0.195	-4.46***	394	.036
Out of Pocket Cash Spent	0.0003	0.158	3.31**	394	.020
Friends Contribution	-0.0007	-0.251	-5.36***	394	.052
Total Cash Spent	0.0000	0.022	0.48	394	.000
Regression Constant	1.063				

Multiple Correlation Squared = 0.291 F = 23.09 with 7 and 394 Degrees of Freedom (P under .001)

Multiple Correlation = 0.539

NOTE

* P $\leq$ .05

** P $\leq$ .01

*** P $\leq$ .001

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